

**Testimony on SB 322: AAC The Qualifications of Department of Children and  
Families Employees  
Select Committee on Children  
February 22, 2011**

Good morning. My name is Jan Fontanella. I have been a professional social worker for more than twenty five years, receiving my MSW from the University of Connecticut in 1982. I worked in non profit private agencies providing direct service and managing programs serving high risk families and children.

During my career I had the privilege and sometimes the frustration of working closely with DCF Central Office and workers from across the state. I found most of DCF employees to be hard working and dedicated, but too often lacking the professional training to do their jobs. Every day these workers are required to make difficult decisions requiring both clinical judgement and a knowledge of policy issues that affect the families they serve. Yet, because of their diverse professional backgrounds they lacked a commonality of training and commitment to shared values and ethics that would assure consistency in their decision making.

The bill proposed by Senator Toni Harp would alleviate many of these problems. My colleagues and I have often been frustrated when reading in the newspaper about an action or decision made by a "social worker" when in fact the worker had no such professional degree. The title social worker is often applied too casually to workers who have degrees in English or as in one case I am familiar with, Civil engineering. Requiring DCF to hire workers who have professional social work training will benefit both the workers and the families they serve. Services will be delivered by professionals with the required professional training as well as a commitment to social work values and ethics. The professional standards of the department will be raised, providing a more supportive environment in which the workers can perform their very difficult responsibilities. Once these professional standards are implemented the Department will also have an easier time recruiting and retaining professional staff. Workers are always more fulfilled when working in a supportive environment with consistent standards and values.

Thank You.

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